

VALUABLE ENGAGEMENT

Rory Murphy FRICS, Commercial Director, VINCI Facilities, chairs the RICS' new member engagement, experience and value (MEEV) working group. Here, he brings Sara Bean up to date with the ethos and progress of the group

L launched in 1868, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) is one of the leading institutes within the built environment, representing 140,000 members operating out of 146 countries. Over the past year it has been hit by a governance scandal that led to the resignation of four senior figures, including CEO Sean Tompkins and President Kath Fontana. This followed the publication of an independent review by QC Alison Levitt that found four non-executives who had raised concerns over an audit in 2018 had been wrongly dismissed.



Now operating under a new interim team, the RICS is awaiting the results of an independent review being carried out by Civil Servant, Lord Michael Bichard into its governance and purpose. One of the most eye-catching comments from Bichard's summary of responses so far was that many members felt that power has shifted from members to senior staff at RICS to such an extent that "RICS was no longer a member-led organisation".

He has also referred to the survey 'Defining our Future', carried out prior to the governance crisis, which pointed to a decline in member engagement in recent years. The RICS had in fact, already taken steps to address this issue, and now, running separately to the Bichard review, has set up a Member Engagement, Experience and Value (MEEV) working group. It is chaired by Rory Murphy, Commercial Director at VINCI Facilities and a fellow of RICS who has long been associated with the FM group at RICS.

He explains he was approached to take on the role before the governance crisis hit: "The Bichard review is looking at governance and purpose which doesn't really cut across what we're doing. Our group is absolutely focused on membership feedback. And it isn't about us coming up with our own ideas, it's more about responding to specific issues that members have raised and working with the management team within the RICS to help develop solutions which we then road test. We're very much a working group."

Defining our futures was carried out in early 2021 and comprised round tables and consultations to gather feedback on the Institute.

Says Murphy: "What came through was how difficult it was [for members] to become engaged with RICS. Membership experience was another issue, including transactional challenges like

renewing your subs or contacting the call centre and there were concerns about transparency.

"If you wrap all those issues together and it's in the heart of a pandemic, people were starting to question the value for money. 'I pay my fees and what am I getting for it, what's in for me? If the experience isn't great and the engagement isn't great, what am I getting?'"

WORKING GROUP

Murphy was approached to chair the Member Engagement, Experience and Value (MEEV) working group by the exec team who'd noted his previous successful chair of the responsible business in real estate report.

He says: "I'd helped the RICS for over 12 years on the FM side and I've got so much time for the team there. I did genuinely want to come and help so it wasn't much of an ask, though I wasn't 100 per cent sure what I walking into.

"I think they knew I'd take an honest, pragmatic approach as I'm not interested in the kudos of doing it but just wanted to help make things better. I was delighted but slightly terrified to be asked but I was aiming to help shape it to make a difference. The group is fundamentally about the membership and addressing very real concerns about Engagement, Experience and Value but I also want to help the teams that work at the RICS be proud of the institution and the tireless work they do."

The group is made up of three members of the governing council from Germany, the Caribbean and Australia and five world regional board chairs, hailing from UK & Ireland, Europe, Asia, the Americas and the Middle East. There are also three UK national board chairs and three board chairs from around the world, including Poland, Hong Kong and UAE along with a representative from

Matrix in the UK to represent the younger generation.

“It’s all very cosmopolitan,” says Murphy. “And with a total of 15 on the group including me, it isn’t unwieldy, so we can get together once every couple of weeks. We have a clear programme we work with as we go through proposals and how we operate, given the global nature means some of our meetings are at strange times.

“Even with governing council members in the group there is no hierarchy and by including the world regional board leads they’ve a connection to their regions and can feedback our progress to their member’s groups. The working group also includes local board leads who are closest to rank and file members, so we’re very member led.

“We also have a good relationship with the exec team who I work with directly, and approach it as a partnership. Also, the RICS staff have been brilliant and they’ve been really good in picking this mantle up and running with it.”

Murphy is keen to point out that the group has anchored its activities to concentrate on responding to member feedback which guards against the group determining its own agenda. The group is also carrying out a gap analysis based on the RICS most recent survey of the profession to check that what people were commenting on a year ago is still applicable now.

Says Murphy: “All of the work we would focus on is 100 per cent anchored on whatever feedback we get and part of my role in ensuring that when these 14 people get together we concentrate on what the membership has told us, what we’re going to do to solve it and what is the output.

“It isn’t a group to which people address queries, we’ll respond to the feedback we’ve had and how to address that. It’s broad in its initiatives but knows its boundaries, which are areas that relate to the experience the members have, the value for money they perceive and how engaged they feel. That’s the frame of it and what we’re not trying to do here is address concerns about how the organisation is governed or what is its purpose – that is not for this group.”

MEMBERSHIP ENGAGEMENT

According to Murphy the biggest feedback they’ve had is regarding events, engagement and members coming together, whether they are social or more formal strategic conferences. A lack of interaction is due to a variety of issues, not least the huge impact of the pandemic. But alongside this, the number of professional



boards had diminished prior to COVID and the stripping back of resources by the former CEO and the exec team in the early part of the pandemic took away much of the regional support.

Says Murphy: “A lot of the feedback is that people can’t develop and host local events as we don’t have people on the ground, which they feel cuts into the value as it’s a people industry and they want to get together to share experiences.”

The biggest frustration he says has been the inability to see fellow members, and the resources not being there to make this happen.

“This is why the main thing now is resourcing and rebuilding, within the right financial constraints. Rebuilding the resources around events and finding ways people can communicate in a meaningful way with each other. There’s a sense that the RICS was getting in the way of things happening, so this group is very much ‘how do we facilitate these events happening, how do we make sure we can all get together and how do we do that in the way that has the lightest touch?’”

To manage this fine balance, the MEEV

has announced RICS will formally support a number of free local engagement events, leaving members to play the leading role in the selection of the topics being covered. RICS will play an ‘enablement’ role, helping the local members with organisation, logistics and promotion of the events.

“One of the things we’re trying to develop is more open conversations around what is feasible and what isn’t, given local membership numbers” says Murphy. “The challenge the RICS has, like many organisations is in cutting a lot of staff during the pandemic it now has to top that number up which is difficult to do in the current recruitment marketplace.”

Learning and Development is an area that goes straight to the value of being a member of the institution. This is why a new CPD Member Support Package has been launched that offers free CPD to members as part of their membership subscription. Murphy was particularly pleased with how quickly the RICS were able to deliver this change so that it was ready for the start of the 2022 membership period.

He explains: “When you go into the member value hub you can start your own CPD package to work across your number of required hours as part of your subscription. It’s a real recognition that you have to have something of value for your fees.”

Another key area of concern for members was transparency, so the group has worked with RICS teams to produce a chart depicting how the revenues generated from

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fees are allocated across the Institution. They intend to update this information annually, adding further layers of detail as they go forward.

Explains Murphy: “Now we have the transparent break down of fees, which was road tested on the group. I’m proud of the fact we’ve got a break down of the fee. It may prompt debate on how resources are allocated but it’s there in black and white and over time we can listen to the membership to determine if the split is right. It’s a mature discussion.”

BROAD CHURCH

RICS has a huge influence and reach but one of the drawbacks, according to Bichard’s summary of responses is that members do not feel engaged or supported in their professional area of practice, and cite other professional bodies of which they are members they felt were better placed to provide specialist advice and support. A similar complaint runs through the regional membership with those based in the UK complaining the drive for global expansion had become too dominant, while some members based outside the UK felt RICS was too focused on the UK. The RICS says Murphy is well aware of this conundrum.

“One of the advantages of having the various regional board members is part of their role is to take a temperature from their boards on what they’re hearing from their members. We approach membership as a collective in this MEEV group, but clearly those various pathways would want the RICS to do more for them specifically, as do the various regions.

“I’d argue the broad church is the thing that makes RICS powerful, because we’re all operating in the building asset lifecycle. If you look at the global challenges, our environmental agenda or the D&I agenda they’re for everybody to contribute.

“Anyone who works within the built environment needs to understand these big issues. For instance, the IBOS standard which was published recently covers areas that we drive in FM and equally so, we’ve also published ‘Responsible Business in Real Estate’ which featured a lot of FM practitioners who helped pull it together.

“Over time the voice of the various pathways will have to be listened to in the same way the geographic conundrum is being consulted. Every member I’ve been in touch with has the intention of helping make RICS great again. No one’s looking back – we’re being positive about the future.”

COMMUNICATIONS AND FEEDBACK

MEEVs has already published an update report on the RICS website to keep membership informed on progress and will carry out six-monthly checks on engagement levels. They’re also looking at the metrics, including how many members are taking up the CPD offer, how many people have looked at the breakdown of fees and how many have visited the new member value portal. This latter initiative aims to bring together all aspects of the membership value proposition in one place.

Future digital plans include a digital communities portal planned for the second quarter of this year, to provide members with event and communication ‘autonomy’ along with a member-to-member digital community platform. According to Murphy, the creation of a digital community will offer much more opportunity for member to member engagement, and the option to start your own groups that include people with common interests.

He says: “This removes RICS from being the middle man in terms of GDPR perspective, so once a member joins a community they can communicate with other members across the globe. For instance, say you decide to set up a global FM group and have members across the

world. As with all of these things it’ll depend on members’ engagement but if you do take part you’ve the option to reach out to people wherever they may be.”

As Murphy comments: “Members are interested in developing their careers, getting value for money for their fee and meeting like-minded practitioners, and they want to learn and understand global issues as well as local issues.”

Less exciting but no less important priorities for the group are to explore hygiene factors such as the effectiveness of the customer call centre, ways of increasing member influence and looking at how to rebuild professional groups - including how they will be structured.

Interestingly, feedback so far shows that most of the members also believe the institution should ensure they sort out the governance which is a key output of the current Bichard Review.

“What I’m seeing now is people are letting the organisation sort itself out and would like in the meantime to see output increase, but the RICS needs the resources to do so. My sense though is that people are happy to give the RICS space to work through these issues and I feel encouraged.”

FUTURE PLANS

The group is briefed to carry on analysing and responding to membership feedback for the rest of this year while the Institute waits to hear the outcome of the wider governance review.

However, Murphy’s personal opinion is that having a member led group of this sort which pulls together the constituent parts of the RICS would benefit the institution in the longer term.

He says: “We’re certainly here for the implementation of the issues we’ve outlined here and I think the ability to pull together the governing council, the world regional boards, the management team and membership is a real positive.

“In the longer term the members need a strong voice that can help make things happen. I appreciate we’ve got a huge responsibility to make the RICS work for the next 150 years – and with my built environment hat on, I want our younger generation to become as professional as possible, understand all these global challenges and operate in a responsible way.”

FURTHER INFORMATION

www.rics.org/uk/news-insight/latest-news/news-opinion/rics-updates-for-member-experience-value/